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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire on various aspects of academic freedom was mailed to 50 randomly selected members of the instructional staff at four schools in the Los Angeles Junior College District. This survey sought to identify potential problem areas and to determine in what areas further study was needed. Thirty-three instructors (66 per cent)--all teaching in the social sciences--responded. Twenty-nine of them were tenured. Results indicate that existing or expected restrictions on academic freedom in this district represent a serious problem and require further study. Thirty-nine per cent (13) reported some restriction on freedom to discuss certain controversial issues in class; 30 per cent (10) said they had experienced some form of overt pressure to avoid class discussion of such issues. The Board of Trustees was seen as the prime source of restriction. Three respondents felt restricted in discussing certain issues because colleagues or students were informing the board about the classroom activities; however, most felt that their greatest support also came from these two groups. They felt that the AFT, faculty senate, and AAUP provided the greatest professional support. In defining academic freedom, most saw it as a freedom from arbitrary restrictions or pressures, limited by reasonable standards of good taste. [Because of marginal reproducibility of original, this document is not available in hard copy.] (JO)

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A Preliminary Investigation of the Problem of Academic Freedom in the Junior College.

Robert J. Fitch

December 1970

Introduction

Basically, the community junior colleges and the four year schools endorse the same principles of academic freedom and generally face the same types of problems and pressures in regard to restrictions and abuse of that freedom. Like the four year schools, the junior college instructor has the protection of tenure, the support of professional organizations, and in many cases works for a district that has adopted a policy statement that is similar to those found at the universities.

Though community colleges are basically similar to the four year institutions in terms of their views about academic freedom there are several factors that tend to limit academic freedom on community college campuses.

The primary factor that tends to restrict the discussion of controversial issues by faculty at the junior college is the close proximity of the community served by the school. Though the state controlled four-year institutions also serve a community, that community is typically much larger and more heterogeneous than the community served by the junior college. In the case of the four-year institution, it is much more difficult for small pressure groups to influence the school and frequently (at least until recently) the public has little or no idea about what is happening at the school.

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In contrast, the community served by the junior college is generally aware what is being taught at the school and local pressure groups can, and frequently do, exert direct pressure on the governing board and administration. As noted by Blocker, Plummer and Richardson (1965) junior college instructors "being professionals...expect maximun freedom in teaching, and external interference can result in a general debilitation of the quality of teaching and of the morale of the faculty" (p. 161). However, the faculty members of the community college "functions as part of the local community. Its faculty members are also friends and neighbors of the parents of students, board members, and influential citizens. There is continual interaction between the college faculty and the citizens, so that any deviation from the traditions and mores of the community is immediately apparent to all. This close relationship exerts a subtle but pervasive influence toward conformity by the faculty (p. 162). Blocker, Plummer and Richardson also note that "local communities tend to be more conservative on issues which have a direct bearing upon the status quo. If the social or economic balance of the community is threatened by the faculty, there well may be a strong negative reaction. Such is not the case when the college serves a large area or a large population and interaction is more tenuous and of less immediate importance to the values and self-interest of the adult population" (p. 162). In addition they state that "students in two year colleges tend to be more conservative and less sophisticated than those in other collegiate institutions. They are generally less tolerant of new ideas and resist those which challenge their preconceptions. ...The transmission of new

and different ideas from the college to the home through the student can lead to incidents and misunderstandings as to the content of courses and the concepts being considered in the classroom. If the community has conservative or reactionary tendencies, there can be serious limitations imposed upon the free discussion of controversial material in college classes" (p. 162).

In addition to the closeness of the community, the junior college also has an administrative structure that is not only less likely to tolerate ideas that deviate from the norm but also tends to feel that they have the right to control what instructors teach. Local board members are frequently elected and feel they must respond to pressure from community groups that want to force the college to follow local community mores. They also tend to be owners of small businesses and tend to be more conservative than the governing boards of many of the major universities. As noted by Hofstadter and Metzer, the boards of many of the major universities were very wealthy businessmen and that "For all their quirks and vulgarities, the tycoons of Fifth Avenue and Newport were closer to the patricians of Beacon Street than to the business gentry of Main Street" (pp. 418-419). They, therefore, took some pleasure in their association with "intellectuals" and often tolerated some degree of "radicalism" on their faculties. Junior college board members are typically the "business gentry from Main Street." They are not only more conservative politically, but also tend to see education as a means of improving the students vocational status and earning power. They frequently are anti-intellectual and have little understanding of what a "liberal arts" education really involves. Though they pay lip service to

academic freedom they are not really in favor of the free, open exchange of ideas.

Junior college administrators also differ from their peers in the four year schools. In the university the Senate and the faculty of the department basically control matters dealing with faculty and curriculum. In the junior college approval of courses and course content, the hiring of staff, the evaluation of instructors and the granting of tenure basically are administrative decisions. Though the faculty may make recommendations, most administrators feel the decisions about curriculum and staff are basically their responsibility.

Many of these attitudes are due to the fact that the junior college has historically been tied to the local secondary schools and many of the administrators and faculty have secondary school backgrounds where administrators exerted strong control over curriculum content and this control was accepted by the faculty.

The net result of all of the above factors is a situation in which community college instructors are urged to be "cautious" and "use appropriate restraint" in what they discuss in their classes and what they say and do in the community.

This point of view is clearly expressed by Kelley and Wilbur in their book on teaching in the community college. Their book is designed for the students who expect to teach in the junior college or are new teachers in the system. In one section of their book, they advise the prospective junior college teacher about what is expected of him in terms of "community relations." Their advice is practical and realistic, but it also is a graphic statement of the restraints the community college may place on the amount of academic freedom the new instructor can expect.

They state that one of the more serious areas of community involvement involves those activities where the instructor exercises his freedom to speak out on controversial issues and problems of a political nature. They advise the new instructor that "By engaging in politics, teachers risk antagonizing people in the local community, especially when these teachers represent a group unpopular with the general community" (p. 128). They continue to say that "the most single valuable guideline for instructors is painstakingly to avoid bringing biases into their instruction. Carrying an authoritative political message and prejudice into the classroom or onto the campus may be what laymen really fear about teachers' community politics. Communities vary widely in their sophistication and ability to allow a dissident view...."

"You will need to know your community rather well before embarking on an unpopular campaign of any sort" (p. 128). They further state that new instructors should seek the advice of the dean of instruction and their colleagues and learn "the boundries of acceptable teacher conduct" for that community.

This is practical and realistic advice, but is not a definition of academic freedom that would be acceptable to many instructors in the university. Kelley and Wilbur do not discuss the instructors obligation to "seek the truth" and communicate it to his students and the community. Their advise is essentially that you have "rights" as a community college instructor, but "clearly the risk must be taken if the right is to be exercised" (p. 128).

Purpose

Because of limitations in time and funds, this study should be

viewed only as a preliminary survey. The number of persons selected for the survey was small and the questionnaire was restricted to a small number of subject area. No attempt was made to contact or identify non-respondents. Therefore the results should be interpreted with caution and within the limits of the design.

The primary purpose of the survey was simply to determine if there might be a problem in the area of academic freedom and if further study of the problem would be justified.

Method

The letter and questionnaire (see Appendix A) was mailed to 50 members of the instructional staff at four major schools in the Los Angeles Junior College District. The instructors were all teaching in the social sciences (history, political science, psychology, sociology, and social science). The names for mailing were picked at random from the names listed in the 1970-71 catalogues. All responses were anonymous.

Results

A total of 33 responses were returned; or 66% of the 50 mailed.

The major subject areas taught by the respondents were:

(a)	History	15
(b)	Political Science	7
(c)	Psychology	7
(d)	Sociology	4
	Total	33

Of this group 29 were tenured and 4 were not.

The responses to the questions are reported for the total group because the number in the various subject areas is too small to warrant detailed analysis.

The questions and the responses are outlined below.

Question	Response		
Do you feel there are any restrictions on your freedom to discuss certain controversial issues in your classes?	yes	13	(39%)
	no	20	(61%)
Have you personally experienced any direct orders, requests or pressures from either the administration or your colleagues to avoid the discussion of certain controversial issues?	yes	10	(30%)
	no	23	(70%)

Question	Response
If so, what was the form of that pressure? (Check more than one if necessary)	
(a) Policy of the Board or college administrators.....	0
(b) Direct orders from the Administration.....	3
(c) Suggestions that action might be taken that could cause you to lose your job.....	5
(d) Comments that suggested that you might be reassigned, have your schedule changed, etc. (e.g., actions other than the loss of your position).....	2
(e) Strong requests from administration that you avoid the subject, but without threats of possible reprisals.....	1
(f) Milder pressures such as expressions of disapproval, requests to be cautious, use restraint, etc.....	3
(g) other (explain).....	3

"other" forms were: "colleagues reported me to the board," -- "course terminated," -- "action taken by administration against other instructors."

Question	Response
Even though you have not experienced any form of external pressures, do you impose any restrictions on yourself because you feel that the discussion of certain issues could be dangerous or damagining to your career?	yes - 13 (39%)
	no - 20 (61%)

If you feel there are restrictions on your freedom to discuss certain issues, which of the following groups do you feel impose these restrictions? (Check more than one if necessary)

_____(a) the community..... 8
_____(b) the Board of Trustees.....14
_____(c) Higher level administrators (Presidents, Deans of Instruction, etc.)..... 8
_____(d) Lower level administrators (Division or Departmental chairmen)..... 1
_____(e) other instructors..... 5
_____(f) students..... 5

which of the above groups do you feel is the primary source of restrictions on your academic freedom?

_____(a) the community..... 4
_____(b) the Board of Trustees.....11
_____(c) Higher level administrators (Presidents, Deans of Instruction, etc.)..... 2
_____(d) Lower level administrators (Division or Departmental chairmen)..... 0
_____(e) other instructors..... 2
_____(f) students..... 2

Question	Response

In the discussion of controverisal subjects have you received any support or encouragement from any of the following groups? (Check more than one if necessary)

_____(a) community groups..... 5
_____(b) the Board..... 1
_____(c) higher level administrators..... 3
_____(d) lower level administrators.....10
_____(e) colleagues.....17
_____(f) students.....17
_____(g) professional organizations.....
_____(1) Faculty Senate..... 7
_____(2) other local faculty associations..... 2
_____(3) CTA..... 3
_____(4) AAUP..... 6
_____(5) CCCFA..... 1
_____(6) AFT.....11
_____(7) other (specify)..... 0

A Listing of the Statements of the Respondents Regarding Their Definition of Academic Freedom.

The statements below are the verbatim responses to question number 9 which asked the instructors to define academic freedom.

1. A permissiveness which allows an instructor to seek the truth and to investigate and inquiry in the pursuit of knowledge irregardless of how controversial the issue or topic.

2. Academic freedom is the right to present to students the pro and con of controversial issues to the best of one's knowledge and ability.

3. Absence of arbitrary restrictions on the expression of ideas

4. Academic freedom is the opportunity to teach your subject according to the best knowledge you have.

5. A sence of being able to teach free of administrative or political pressure - those theories, facts hypotheses of my field creatively Within the moral scope of our laws & norms - free to express opinions among us Without necessarily definding them, as the true attitude - or the gospel. Freedom to think and brain-storm a question without ego attacks or other emotional fits.

6. To seek truth, i.e. knowledge, through the presentation and analysis of all available relevant data.

7. Freedom means you can do as you wish if you don't harm others. Academic Fr. means you can teach the Truth; or you can teach what does not harm others (that is you cannot lie, slander or propandize, which can result in serious harm (physical, mental or moral) to others, and claim that this is Ac. Fr. - it is not, it is Ac. licence or licentiousnes or even academic criminality).

8. Freedom to discuss in the classroom issues which the students and/or the Instructor feel are related to the subject matter of the course they are taking, no matter what material this happens to include.

9. Being able to discuss anything, directly or indirectly related to my major field, so long as it is in good taste & with some perspective & doesn't merely stop at being propagandizing.

10. Freedom of inquiry & discussion without fear or sanctions or reprisals - freedom to look at all areas of experience objectively, freedom to know.

11. The complete freedom to discuss the various points of view of any controversial issue or subject.

12. The right to pursue "truth" without restriction, except when in direct violation of the LAW!

13. Right of an instructor to teach in his area of expertise, with a near-absolute freedom to present what he considers facts, as facts, opinions, as opinions, meanwhile encouraging or presenting alternative opinions.

14. The ability and freedom to take up any subject without the slightest censorship from outside sources I assume one does not take it upon himself to advocate violence or violent physical revolution. One must persuade not coerce minds. Also ones own opinions must be labeled as your opinion and that others equally or better qualified than I may have different opinions or disagree.

15. Academic freedom exists when the teacher and his students jointly pursue the truth about any values, institutions, and ideas without fear.

16. Academic freedom is the right of the instructor and the students to discuss what they deem to be significant. (Note: This respondent marked out statement: "Regardless of the consequences")

17. Freedom-to discuss objectively and subject related to the course being taught--and outside of class to discuss any subject rationally.

18. The freedom to teach without political pressure from any side, but always observing the dictates of good taste/and the necessity of being relevant & objective.

19. The freedom of a professional instructor and/or other member of the academic community to seek the truth through teaching and research in his field. This means that the individual faculty member has a responsibility to examine all sides of the evidence in his discipline and to teach that discipline - not encourage sedition or revolution. It also means that institutions of higher learning must not become advocates for extremist groups who seek to destroy the freedom of others, for instance, by disrupting their classes and take even more violent actions.

20. The freedom to express any opinions without being penalized.

21. As the freedom to lecture on, discuss, and study all points of view on any topic relative to the curriculum, with any restrictions placed by the academic community itself. It is not license to do anything and it rests on a responsible attitude towards community mores.

22. I would think that academic freedom is the unlimited and unrestricted right of the teacher to search for the truth and to articulate the truth as he sees it; it is also the right of the student to learn, to investigate, to think, and to express his vision of the truth. I do not think that either right is "absolute," but where to draw the line is the difficult problem and can only be rationally attempted on a case-by-case basis.

23. Intellectual freedom with responsibility.

24. Freedom to search for the truth and to present it in as objective and impartial fashion as possible.

25. Right to discuss anything pertinent to the subject being taught.

26. The freedom to teach about any subject, no matter how controversial and unpopular and to examine that subject from all points of view. Generally, I think teachers should not use their positions as propagandists for a particular point of view, although complete impartiality is impossible and there is something to be said for the "devel's advocate" technique. My ideas on academic freedom are more complex than this; the term doesn't fit into dictionary definitions.

List of Controversial Topics Avoided in Classes

(answers to question #2)

Comments or general topics avoided as listed by respondents	Number who indicated subject was avoided
"Sex"	3
"Religion"; role of the church	4
"Race"	2
"Economic theories"	2
"Political-Economic theories"	3
"Politics"	2
"Violence on campus"	1
"Law and order vs. justice"	1
"Law enforcement and student rights"	1
"Social conditions and law enforcement"	1
"Black Panther speakers"	1
"Values of our society and/or community"	3
"Current social conditions"	2
"Comments about Reagan"	1
"Board policies"	1

Two special cases (not included in the above) deserve to be mentioned. One instructor felt his freedom to criticize communism was being restricted by his "so-called liberal" colleagues. Another instructor felt the BSU restricted his freedom to discuss certain topics of Black History

Discussion

Despite the limitations of the study, the results indicate that restrictions on the academic freedom of junior college instructors in the Los Angeles District is probably a serious problem and one that should be investigated more thoroughly.

39 percent of the respondents felt that there were restrictions on their freedom to discuss certain controversial issues (question #1) and 30 percent indicated they had personally experienced some form of overt pressure to avoid certain topics (question #3). It should also be noted that 4 of the 20 people who answered "no" to question #1 did state that they imposed restrictions upon themselves because they felt that the discussion of certain issues could be damaging to their careers. Four other respondents also made comments that indicated that even though there were no restrictions on their academic freedom at the present time, they expected them to occur in the future.

In terms of the source of the restrictions, over 50 percent of the respondents who felt that there were some restrictions on their academic freedom indicated that the Board of Trustees was the primary source of those restrictions. However, interpretation of this finding is difficult because of the way the question was asked. The questionnaire does not reveal to what extent the staff feels that the Board is reacting to community pressures and to what extent it is acting on its own.

Because of the recent allegations that the classes of "liberal" faculty were being monitored by student "informants" it should be noted that three respondents specifically mentioned that they believed that their freedom to discuss certain issues was restricted

because either colleagues or students were informing the Board about their classroom activities.

The results also indicate that when overt pressure was used the form of that action was rather severe. Five respondents reported that their jobs were threatened, three reported they had received direct orders from the administration to avoid the activity and two stated that the administration suggested they might be reassigned or have their schedule changed.

The pressures felt by untenured faculty was particularly strong. All four respondents without tenure reported they felt some restrictions on their academic freedom. One reported that he had received direct orders from the administration to avoid certain topics and another felt that his contract was not going to be renewed because of his liberal views.

In terms of support for academic freedom, it is not surprising to find that instructors feel their greatest support comes from colleagues and students. However, the results for the degree of support received from the various professional organizations was somewhat surprising. Instructors overwhelmingly perceive the AFT as the principal defender of their academic freedom, but the Faculty Senate and the AAUP received a substantial number of votes. Since in the past AAUP chapters have been weak in the junior colleges and academic senates in the junior colleges are relatively new, the results indicate that the junior colleges may be developing a pattern of governance similar to that established at the university level.

The fact that the Senate and the AAUP received more votes than either CTA and CCFA may indicate a shift away from organizations which have typically spoken for junior college faculties in California. CCFA (The California Community College Faculty Association) originally was developed as a organization for classroom instructors only. Over the years it has advocated strong faculty senates and has been vocal in pushing districts to adopt policies on academic freedom. Yet, in spite of this history only one of the respondents indicated that they had received any support from CCCFA in the discussion of controversial issues.

When asked to state their definition of academic freedom, a surprisingly large number (26 out of 33) of the respondents took the time to state their ideas. Most of the statements express in brief form the basic ideas of the 1940 AAUP statement. Almost without exception the definitions state that academic freedom is: "the freedom to discuss any subjects, no matter how controversial, that are related to the subject being taught." Almost all the statements mention that academic freedom involves freedom from arbitrary restrictions or pressure by administrators or community pressure groups. Most also state or imply that the instructor should present the "truth" as he sees it as a result of his scholarly efforts. Several respondents also mentioned the students freedom to "explore or discuss" the pros and cons of various subjects.

About 50 percent specifically mentioned that academic freedom had some limits. The subjects that could be discussed should be within the limits of "reasonable standards of good taste." Instructors should not propagandize, directly violate laws or advocate

violence. Basically, the majority stated that academic freedom is "freedom with responsibility."

Essentially the definitions indicate that junior college instructors have a clear idea of what they think academic freedom means and that basically they agree with each other and the AAUP.

It should also be noted, that the definitions almost completely ignore the students "freedom to learn" and what rights and freedoms students should have.

Summary and Recommendations

The results of this survey indicate that restrictions on academic freedom in the junior college is a serious enough problem to warrant further study. It, therefore, is recommended that the junior colleges in Southern California (not just L.A. City) cooperate thru their professional organizations (perhaps the Senates) to conduct a thorough study of academic freedom to discover to what extent restrictions may be limiting the free exchange of ideas and the quality of education. Specifically it is recommended that the study include the following:

(a) A study of several districts so that each participating district will have some idea of how they compare to other institutions in terms of their freedom to discuss controversial material.

(b) Conduct a similar survey at two or three of the local state colleges for comparative data.

(c) Survey departments others than social science for comparative purposes.

(d) Expand and revise the questionnaire to include questions about the following:

  (1) a measure of the instructors political views on a liberal-conservative scale.

  (2) questions about restrictions on academic freedom involving activities outside of the classroom including campus speakers, censorship of student newspapers, and off-campus political activity.

  (3) include a question which measures the instructors fears about possible future restrictions.

(4) identify the extent to which any attempts to restrict the instructors freedom were successful.

(5) include questions that would differentiate the extent to which the faculty feels the administrators and the Board are reacting to community pressures, following orders or acting on their own.

(6) include questions about the faculties views about the students "freedom to learn" and students rights.

(7) ask the faculty to express their ideas about what policies and procedures should be developed to protect the freedom of instructors.

It is also recommended that each of the participating districts develop a statement of academic freedom and try to have the statement adopted as Board policy. This statement should include not only statements of principle, but should also clearly outline the procedures that should be followed in cases involving academic freedom, including specific statements about the authority and the roles of the Board of Trustees, the administration and the appropriate faculty organizations. Special emphasis should be placed on what an individual faculty member (or student) can do when he feels his academic freedom is being restricted. This should include information about what legal and consulting services the various professional organizations offer as well as the policy and procedures adopted by the district.

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INFORMATION

Survey on Academic Freedom

Primary subject taught _____
Do you have tenure? (circle) yes no

1. Do you feel there are any restrictions on your freedom to discuss certain controversial issues in your classes?
yes no

2. If so, what are the general topics?

(a)_____

(b)_____

(c)_____

3. Have you personally experienced any direct orders, requests or pressures from either the administration or your colleagues to avoid the discussion of certain controversial issues?
yes no

4. If so, what was the form of that pressure?
(Check more than one if necessary)

_____(a) Policy of the Board or college administrators . . . . . .
_____(b) Direct orders from the Administration
_____(c) Suggestions that action might be taken that could cause you to lose your job
_____(d) Comments that suggested that you might be reassigned, have your schedule changed, etc. (e.g., actions other than the loss of your position)
_____(e) Strong requests from administration that you avoid the subject, but without threats of possible reprisals.
_____(f) Milder pressures such as expressions of disapproval requests to be cautious, use restraint, etc.
_____(g) other (explain)_____

_____

_____

5. Even though you have not experienced any form of external pressures, do you impose any restrictions on yourself because you feel that the discussion of certain issues could be dangerous or damaging to your career?
yes no

6. If you feel there are restrictions on your freedom to discuss certain issues, which of the following groups do you feel impose these restrictions?
(Check more than one if necessary)

(over)

_____(a) the community
_____(b) the Board of Trustees
_____(c) Higher level administrators (Presidents, Deans of Instruction, etc.)
_____(d) Lower level administrators (Division or Departmental chairmen)
_____(e) other instructors
_____(f) students

7. Which of the above groups do you feel is the primary source of restrictions on your academic freedom?

_____

8. In the discussion of controversial subjects have you received any support or encouragement from any of the following groups?
(Check more than one if necessary)

_____(a) community groups
_____(b) the Board
_____(c) higher level administrators
_____(d) lower level administrators
_____(e) colleagues
_____(f) students
_____(g) professional organizations
_____(1) Faculty Senate
_____(2) other local faculty associations
_____(3) CTA
_____(4) AAUP
_____(5) CCCFA
_____(6) AFT
_____(7) other (specify)_____

9. How would you define academic freedom?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____